Daniel 10:12-13 (Ebenezer John Thomas) 145450

Practical Remarks on Prayer, Prayer, Practical Remarks on: 5. Spiritual Opposition and Conflict (10:12-13)

V.-Spiritual Opposition And Conflict

The record about Daniel sheds light upon the hindrances, not so much to prayer, as to the answering of prayer. How many devout supplicants are perplexed at not receiving what they pray for! Well, we find that though the answer to Daniel's prayer was delayed, the delay was not because he was not heard— “Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me” (Daniel 10:12, 13).

Thus, then, there were spiritual impediments, not to Daniel's prayer, not to its being heard and granted, but to the answer reaching him. Here there is good encouragement. For we are apt to suppose that our breath in prayer is lost if an answer is not received at once. But exercise of heart in prayer is never fruitless, though the result may be long delayed. “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God,” was said to Cornelius; and we know not how long he had been kept waiting before Peter was sent to him with the answer: it may have been years (Acts 10). As in Daniel's case, so in Cornelius', and so in ours, there is a time as well as a mode of answering, which rests in the wisdom and grace of God. But so subtle is the working of unbelief that saints often pray and pray earnestly, but yet the last thing that they seem to expect is that God will grant their requests! Old Zacharias had prayed that he might have a son; so it appears from Luke 1:13. He had faith to pray, but not to believe that God would grant his prayer; for when the angel Gabriel tells him that his prayer is heard and that his wife should bear him a son, instead of rejoicing and worshipping, he asks, “Whereby shall I know this?” But our God is very gracious; for this unbelief He chastens Zacharias with dumbness for a season, yet does not withdraw compliance with his petition. Prayer is a great reality, and we know not what unseen transactions are taking place over supplications which we suppose to have been unnoticed or unheard; but let us be assured that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us. The case of Zacharias is an instance of what perhaps often occurs—that saints are in their faith and hope not up to the level of their own prayers.

But in the account of Daniel's praying, what a curtain is uplifted from unseen things! Many suppose that above this world all is good. But scripture lets us know that there are principalities, authorities, and spiritual powers of wickedness in the heavenlies, with whom, indeed, we are in conflict (Ephesians 6:12). Does it seem strange that wicked spirits should he there? The explanation is that there has been sin amongst spiritual creatures as well as in man, and that indeed before man existed. For we find that when only just ushered upon the platform of creation he is confronted by an insidious foe already in existence—that old serpent, the devil. However, man, the material being, though having sinned, has not yet been caste out of the earth, which is the home of his nature; he is still tolerated here, though in rebellion against God, and though he has risen up against, and crucified, the Son of God. Now heaven is the habitat of spiritual beings, as the earth is of material; and the spirits which have sinned are not yet expelled from the heavens, any more than man from the earth.1 So there are opposed beings in the angelic sphere. One of them obstructed for twenty-one days the heavenly messenger sent to Daniel. The hinderer is designated—the prince of the kingdom of Persia—while Michael, one of the chief princes, is “the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people,” that is, Israel (Daniel 12:1). But there will come a time when there will be open war in heaven, resulting in Satan's expulsion thence with his angels, even then not receiving their final doom, which is the lake of fire, but being cast into the earth (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12). It was this event which the Lord looked forward to, and saw in prophetic vision, when He said to His disciples, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18). The Seventy had returned from their mission with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us through Thy name"; and this casting out of demons from their lodgment in mankind was but an earnest of the grander dispossession which should take place when Satan and his angels should be cast out of heaven (Revelation 12:7-9).

In the meanwhile, Satan and his hosts, not yet in confinement, still ranging the heavenlies (he is the prince of the power of the air, Ephesians 2:2), are incessantly seeking to thwart the purposes of God. Man, rejecting every divine testimony, plays into Satan's hands. The believer, however, is delivered from the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13), is no longer under Satan's authority, as once he was; but being, on the contrary, associated with Christ, he becomes the object of Satan's antagonism. The Christian's eyes are opened to the astounding fact that on the platform of this world a war is in progress against God; and that in this he is called to bear a part, to take a side. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the universal lords of this darkness, against spiritual power of wickedness in the heavenlies” (Ephesians 6:12, New Trans.).

In this warfare prayer is a distinct weapon, a part of the panoply of God enumerated in Ephesians 6 “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel” (vers. 18, 19). Epaphras illustrates prayer as a mode of spiritual conflict. The Auth. Vers. says, “Epaphras... saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers” (Colossians 4:12). But the true rendering of the word “laboring” is “combating.” It is the same word as, in John 18:36, is translated “fight” — “then would my servants fight.” Prayer, the last-mentioned piece in the panoply, is the active expression of the essential principle of the conflict, namely, dependence. Man has no strength against Satan, and, in nature, is his willing slave; and the Christian's resource is to lay hold upon a strength which is divine, and which alone can cope with the power of Satan. Hence the entire subject of the armor, and the believer's conflict, is introduced by laying down the foundation principle, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the might of his strength” (Ephesians 6:10, New Trans.). Man must get back to God, and to the creature's condition of dependence, or he remains the slave of Satan. And the saint must be genuinely cast upon the Lord in the sense of his weakness and dependence if he is to be a victor in the battle. [E. J. T.]